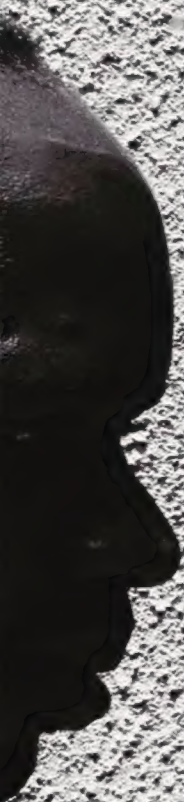


WASQUEGRADE

**Michael Jackson
Alive in Nigeria**



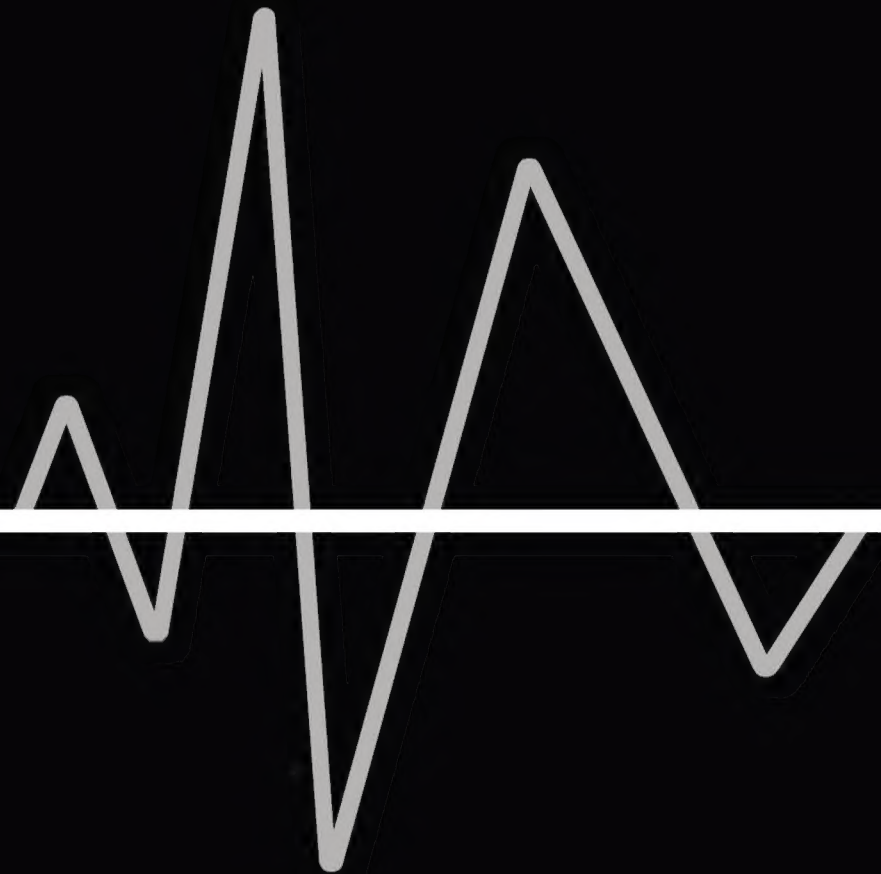


On Money

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not money, I am become as a sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not money, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not money, it profiteth me nothing.

Money suffereth long, and is kind; money envieth not; money vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. . . . And now abideth faith, hope, money, these three; but the greatest of these is money.

St Paul and George Orwell



MASQUERADE

Michael Jackson Alive in Nigeria

Featuring The Maverick
Ejiogbe Twins
Photographed by Owen Logan
And told by
Uzor Maxim Uzoatu

My Dear Mugu

I know you are dying to be rich. Die no more and live, for this letter will make you rich beyond your wildest dreams. My offer to you seems too good to be true – but it is! Only a fool would spurn such an offer. I know of your anguish, your humiliations and the doubtful pleasures during the decades you spent climbing the greasy pole in the Big Apple.

This is your opportunity to be free, to strike it rich, to net billions from the country you left behind – the land of magic and surprise known as Nigeria. Who can be afraid of our riddles? Only those whose blind avarice has made them weak-minded or those who partake in our national vanity... I know you are a wise fellow who will not succumb to these sins, so let me surprise you once again, Mugu my old friend. I have been discovered!

I am the long-lost blood brother and soul-filled reincarnation of the one and only Michael Jackson.



Press gang

Forget the fiction that Michael Jackson is dead. I am alive and kicking, which means for a fact that the black soul singer turned white megastar is here in good old Nigeria. You can take my word for it, behind this mask I also happen to be Michael's twin. I am sure you would not want me to write a book as fat as Alex Haley's *Roots* to trace the lineage of "Wacko Jacko" and my very close consanguinity to him. Let's make the money first and we can go into the details later; suffice it to say that Michael's homecoming and reincarnation in me was quite emotional and indeed traumatic. His ghost could not but break down and weep when memories came flooding of how our great-great-grandfather was sold into slavery via the Long Juju of Arochukwu and how, centuries later, the African spirit of Obi, aka Obeah, entered into the randy man who ended up siring the weird one and me, one in America and the other here in Nigeria!

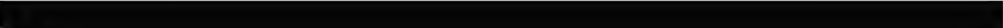


Red carpet arrival


Magical Realism, I hear you say? Let us leave that watered-down and adulterated brand to the opportunistic literati. Are we in Africa not all supposed to be brothers and sisters? Michael used to employ lookalikes so he could appear in two places at once, but now that his lonesome ghost has found me, I am in such demand that I also need lookalikes. And together we have a game such that we appear and disappear and the world looks on in wonderment, not knowing the difference. Michael can be everywhere at once. Mugu, I have to report the happy news that I have mastered the art of omnipresence!



Friendly Michael - Lonely Michael

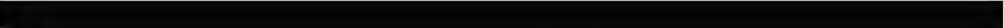


You can guess that Michael's transformations in the course of his long career make our doubling game a trifle complicated for a still-black man like me. I haven't yet had the benefit of the surgeon's plastic arts but really that's of little consequence. Our public has grown used to mere impersonators – which I am not. All sorts of dubious people have masqueraded as our benefactors, but this godly country desires nothing short of a Messiah and Michael auditioned for that part long before he landed here, in me.






Michael drops in on fellow stars of stage and screen



I'll let you into the spellbinding details of my deeper-than-skin bond with Michael when we meet at the Waldorf Astoria to spend a bit of the huge fortune accruable to us from this Nigerian saga. Imagine the spin-offs from the unprecedented story of my once secret life as Michael Jackson's twin: Hollywood mega-movies, global TV series, blockbuster Broadway hits, heavy book contracts, you name it. Yes, big bucks, fast life, yet these shall only be trivial things to us. There is more to this deal than pots of money. What I shall be offering you, my friend, is a dish best served cold – revenge!





Guard dogs for the future

I will come to the end of our particular knife in due course but I will begin with certain formalities in case you want to share this investment opportunity with any of your favoured and trusted associates. The main rule of the Nigerian game is that once a deal clicks here you will almost instantly become richer than your peers. Ask England's golden boy and number one captain of business, Mr. Branson of Virgin Atlantic. I'm sure he will come your way soon. I may spot him myself passing overhead in one of his hot-air balloons and you never know where he will turn up. After the happy-go-lucky Branson got a letter awarding him the ownership of our national airline he said he was headed for outer space next. And Nigeria Airways, that which could have passed for a weebegone harlot, was for a fleeting moment turned into a delectable virgin – yes, Virgin Nigeria!



Michael's greatest fans

Take my letter for it, and make your own Nigerian fortune. Don't make the mistake of one overly suspicious foreign investor who actually got the letter before Branson but was wasting his time thinking of 419, the so-called Advance Fee Fraud named after the most popular section of our Penal Code. Now the swashbuckling Branson has made his kill that potential and ill-fated investor has gone quite mad. He's acting funny like the German professor who missed out on owning a Nigerian brewery when he started staggering after drinking two bottles of Nigerian beer, and was heard complaining aloud: "I asked for beer but you gave me alcohol!"

Oh yes, what Nigeria has to offer can prove to be too much for the fainthearted. Africa's most populous country is big like the elephant which, incidentally, used to be the emblem of the wingless Nigeria Airways. In the scramble for, and the partition of, this nation through privatisation or liberalisation or structural adjustment or globalisation or whatever, let's just say that in briefly taking Nigeria Airways Branson succeeded in grabbing only the tongue of the elephant. The rest of the beast is still there to be had in our new enterprise, and you happen to be the real McCoy in this historic hit.



The natives trade beads with Michael

What Nigeria offers in the Michael Jackson business stares you in the face.
And here in black and white is our unique scheme.

Believe it when I say we struck like tropical noonday thunder! The craft bearing us came down on the Nigerian tarmac with a screech that shook the corporate capital. The megastar in me disembarked and kissed the soil of his ancestors before stepping on the red carpet and spreading his gloved hands wide beckoning the people to him. There could not have been a greater epoch-making event, trapping the annals and centuries of history and geography in one magic moment.

Up from slavery and rising to the giddy heights of universal pop superstardom, Michael returned from death as the local boy made good. He is alive in me and I am here, on our terra firma of some 250 peoples imperiously cobbled together and named after the River Niger by Flora Shaw, the solicitous paramour of Governor-General Lugard, past master of indirect rule.



Breakdown

Like my dear brother Michael this nation is a black phenomenon made for white people. We have thrown caution to the winds, put aside all pretences of economic independence and now we run the full gamut of foreign investment. But you, Mugu, need go no further than the hotel. It is a fact of recent history that then President Olusegun Obasanjo – the military ruler turned emperor of democracy – could only be tracked down in airports and hotels across the globe in his interminable junkets aimed at attracting investment through his own personal globetrotting example. All an advertised foreign investor needs to do now is to show up at the Nigerian airport from where he is shepherded to a posh hotel for the fast business before jetting out on the next available flight. That's the way we do our business, from the airport to the hotel, and Nigeria flies abroad.

Nobody thought of the remote possibility of surpassing the decrepitude of our electricity company NEPA(known to us as Never Expect Power Always), which the emperor then re-baptized as PHCN(Problem Has Changed Name). Yet it has come to pass that Obasanjo, Enron and Co. went from bad to worse. Truly an unfortunate predicament but later I shall explain just why it is impossible to buck this takeover trend. For now, Mugu, what you should know is that we can be yours for a cold drink, and you will be happy to be ours for that hospitable gesture!



Looking for another limousine

Undeniably, Nigeria and Michael were made for each other. In dropping in on the museum containing the Mercedes Benz car in which the former head of state, Major-General Murtala Muhammed, was slain in the wee hours of a Lagos coup morning, we could not but evoke our imperial politicking for all to see. It's a long story, but Nigeria is nothing but a gatekeeper state, one from which you, too, can reap abundantly if you'll just follow my lead.

You see, behind our gatekeepers there is nothing but money-making and so there is everything one could want, Mugu. In the museum I initiated Michael into the little known ritual of awakening into democracy dead dictators by glimpsing at their ever-present portraits dotting every inch of the walls. Thus he also became introduced to Lord Lugard who amalgamated the Northern and Southern protectorates of the country with the charge that the South must forever serve as "the lady of means" to keep feudalism alive in the North. Lugard's officers were his "whisperers behind the throne" but now, Mugu, thanks to the power of resurrection we, the two in one, are the whisperers and dead or alive we are already in great demand.



A hero made for Nigerian roads

Gowon, one of Michael's fellow stars of stage and screen, was overthrown for not knowing what to do with money. Murtala Muhammed saw death shouting madly at imperialism, while the child of fortune, Obasanjo, survived him as the darling of the Western world when he launched Nigeria into the debt business of the International Misery Fund and subsequently handed over power to the civilians in 1979 to democratize deception and graft. The self-advertised corrective regime led by Major General Buhari aborted the democracy of graft but was itself upstaged in a 1985 palace coup by General Ibrahim Babangida who upped the ante in graft, devaluation and debts until the annulment of the elections of June 1993 forced him out of office in disgrace. All this eventually paving the way for the eventful rule of his bloodthirsty sidekick, General Sani Abacha, who infamously killed Ken Saro-Wiwa...

The bad dictator was mad at his very wealthy old friend becoming the darling of the liberal lobby by parading himself as a poor poet fighting for his endangered minority. The parade goes on, and it's bigger than ever now the so-called militants and freedom fighters are in the pockets of government, and are even armed by crews of ballot-rigging politicians. Where else in the world is the home territory of freedom fighters also a stronghold of the ruling party? Look upon the masquerade, Mugu!



Rescued by the Maverick Twins

As a child of HIStory Michael learnt of Nigeria's arrival at mere flag independence; October 1, 1960, the day the colonial masters became independent of their nation! Michael's soul has borne witness to Nigeria's history of coups and pogroms culminating in the civil war that sent you away from here. It was after that war that the petrodollar con game overwhelmed Nigeria such that the youthful General Gowon famously said that Nigeria's problem was not money but how to spend it. That was an invitation for the greatest frauds, perpetrated by our respectable financial advisors – native and foreigner alike – all those pioneers of development who promised us the earth but immiserated the people and took the ground from under our feet!

Mugu, we were all swindled by Uncle Sam's novel super-imperialism. Before the petrodollar game really took off it was the arms business that pioneered "dollar recycling" which of course sounds like the opposite of what it really is. Herman Kahn, the classic Cold War warrior and advocate of nuclear warmongering, was so overjoyed by Uncle Sam's new-found licence to print dollars to order that he couldn't help announcing it to his circle of friends as "the greatest rip-off in history!" "We've run rings round the British Empire", he sniggered. But now, Mugu, from Michael's reincarnation we shall fashion our finest and greatest revenge.



Taking new steps

The daredevil Saro-Wiwa said he wanted to disrobe the masquerade of our politics in which he had also played varied supporting roles. But the suddenly beatified Saro-Wiwa wasn't the real trouble. It was that we were starting to run short on masks. Our old European colonial masters turned into economists, financiers and advisors of all sorts, and then our dictators turned into emperors of democracy to please the new imperial masters in America, but it's all wearing thin.

We've arrived just in time to lift the spirits and raise the feel-good factor. You see, the thing is that countries are not allowed to go bankrupt. Everything else can go bankrupt, even banks if truth be told, but not a nation. If you wonder why that should be so, my friend, let me enlighten you: there is just too much money to be made in keeping wrecks afloat! Think about that, Mugu, and let me explain our current predicament as well as our fabulous opportunities.



The band arrives

The aspect of Nigerian history that thrills Michael “The Thriller” the most, and which beckoned his ghost to me, was Abacha’s sudden death while eating the apple of two Indian ladies. A man of action, Abacha died in action. Michael could hardly believe the theatrical reversal of fortunes that saw Obasanjo – whom Abacha had jailed – being spirited from prison to the presidency like Nelson Mandela of South Africa. Things change but always remain the same.

It’s a tired old business. We can’t perform the South African trick and change colour. That’s where Michael lends a truly fresh face; just as Obama did for the White House, just as all those lesser pop stars did for the G8 mob who want our oil to run swift and cheap. And never forget it, my dear Mugu, that’s always the real deal in these parts. Not for nothing did strongman Gaddafi say Nigeria is “a big for nothing” country! We’ve always tried to please Uncle Sam so now we shall look the part.



Return to the soul sound

The oil price keeps rising while the national economy keeps falling from each boom to bigger busts. Our interest in the matter is not the Nigerian economy but the petrodollar game whereby Uncle Sam prints the dollars and the rest of us produce the things dollars can buy. Uncle Sam picked up dollar diarrhoea from President Tricky-Dicky's expensive sojourn in Vietnam but his condition has taken a terminal turn now. The papers and the TV will tell you that Uncle Sam's fiscal incontinence was derived from consuming some exotic property investments. My dear Mugu, if you believe that...

Thanks to Uncle Sam's chequebook diplomacy we've all supported his world reserve currency which is nothing but his own soaring debts - for which the rest of us are supposed to suffer. Of course Uncle Sam is getting nervous. Saddam Hussein, fallen star in the axis of evil, wanted to trade oil in euros, and when Hugo Chavez chimed in with similar wicked thoughts he was added to the same death list. Yet we too have some delinquents who want to trade our oil in support of "Nairaland" and wipe Uncle Sam's bottom no more. And then there is the matter of our overly friendly production quotas which come courtesy of Uncle Sam's friends in OPEC – known properly as the Organisation for Petroleum-Eased Consumerism. My dear Mugu, in our humble opinion, what's required is an entirely new scheme.



The elders gather

Uncle Sam is rushing all over the world like an old colonial district officer looking for shady places to relieve his behind of a thunderous burden coming, as often as not, in the shape of “shock and awe”. Pax Americana was never what it was cracked up to be but this is no joke, we shall be back to civil war if we keep dancing to the same imperial tunes.

Nowadays my poor twin, who did everything to become white, has no need of a mere recording company, Sony that is. Michael says the Sony chairman, Tommy Mottola, was mean. “He’s a racist, and he’s very, very devilish”. But in this season of freefall Michael has an entirely new patch: Nigeria, the Giant of Africa! When everyone said he was finished Michael courted death and then by dying showed everyone what he was worth all along.

No wonder his is a restless soul. Now people have been saying the same about Nigeria for years: that we’re finished and done for. Well, my dear Mugu, aside from our quite normal custom of bringing the dead to life for their gratification and our entertainment, nobody yet knows what Nigeria can do for Michael and what Michael can do for Nigeria.



Dance acts

As you can see my dear Mugu, Michael's reincarnation opens the vista on the yet-to-be-bought-off hinterland, the heart of the country where new dance steps are honed. Quaint, old-fashioned rural poverty is the perfect setting for Michael to learn a new trade, where characters appear and disappear, transmogrify, die, wake up, drink a beer, kill, make faces and generally have a ball and the audience just have to keep guessing. The band plays the roots, and Michael sings from the heart and the soul. The living, the dead and the unborn all gather, grooving with the son who returned to the land in me.



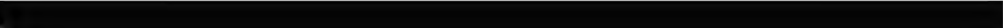
Moves in the old grooves

Michael's first marketing secret was that when white kids were turning into mad punk rockers, he was a nice black boy. But a bit too nice, he thought. Unfortunately, the release of yet another of Michael's bestselling albums, 'Bad', back in 1987, prompted our brother Jermaine to reply with the song, 'Word to the Bad'. Jermaine was only jealous but that song was an omen, and to be honest it was downhill from there. Michael had to cough out \$20 million in 1993 for an out-of-court settlement of child abuse charges. Then he married Lisa Marie, the daughter of the legendary Elvis Presley. Now that could have been a great business partnership but, lamentably, the marriage lasted only eighteen months.


Then, in 1995, Michael released HIStory Past Present & Future yet could only boast of one hit single, "You Are Not Alone". Sadly my long-lost twin was a lonely man, only truly happy in the animal kingdom and in the company of the innocent. But you see how we have rehabilitated him, he really belongs to us.



Credits and recriminations from the mic spot



When life draws to a close one is drawn back to the roots. This will come to you also, my dear friend, so don't wait for your own twilight before you come to us again. Fortunately for Michael his roots are in me and I have the skills needed to bring him back to the world. As you see, Michael's Nigerian saga has already begun. It's an all-encompassing adventure but the appearance of the maverick twins is a hint of the best-kept secret in the world: me, yours truly, the very twin brother of... Hush! Tell nobody about it just yet. Not until the deal clicks.





The old mask

When Michael beheld a precious old mask he knew his return to the roots was complete. The priceless artefact had once been given away to the Queen of England by a Nigerian ruler. The Queen thought she had been given a replica since no serious country would give away this original mask, but she was surprised to her marrow when she discovered Nigeria had given her the real thing. Yes, it is in our character to give, but this old mask gave her some trouble so she sent it straight back.



Trying negritude on Michael

The sad matter is that when we really need our masks back our good old colonial master refuses to return them. Nigeria can't be trusted with her own. But it's cool by us to be patronized somewhat, like the Zulu prince who was sent by his father to greet Queen Elizabeth. The prince was told by the sentry guards at Buckingham Palace that the Queen had gone off to Balmoral Castle in Scotland. When this poor prince showed up at Balmoral he was promptly escorted into a cell at the local police station by the police who thought him a crank. There the prince spent the night imprisoned until the gaffe was discovered. Even so, the young prince was quite pleased to have received this level of hospitality although not exactly from the Queen herself.

Such is the less-than-gracious art of giving and receiving when one is reduced to a state of total dependency. Now we are even supposed to import mosquito nets, lest we benefit too much from our own "needs"! All that is left of our pride is the national beer you drink so nostalgically Mugu, while your old country runs according to a new order.

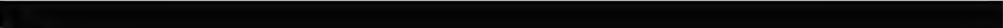


Back to the city triumphant


So after an emotional initiation into negritude, that ideology of feeling not thinking, Michael has made a triumphal entry back to the city for a safari among the urban wildlife made from concrete and metal. You'll see that the destitute children of Africa are also being explored as possible means of raising the funds which Uncle Sam is keener than ever to furnish using his own bills. Diana Ross and the forever marriageable Elizabeth Taylor are some of the senior stars who shall team up with us to create funds out of malnutrition and disease. As they say, "There is aid in fighting AIDS".



End of the ride



Michael could not believe his luck at the vast riches available while incarnating his many Nigerian roles, especially amongst the poor for whom he always wanted to play patron saint. Everything is possible in Nigeria. And where else are events timed so well that a dictator dies in a triple sex act and an elected President dies in prison, and both pave the way for a Messiah democracy to rise up from the same stable of oligarchs? This beloved country of ours does not have politics, we have arrangements. And with your help, my dear Mugu, this is how we shall make our own ascent, one step at a time.





From behind the scenes

In all these delicate matters Michael has been a willing pupil and you must understand how earnest we are in our extra-special enterprise. As earnest as the likes of Bono Vox, that Irish pop star who, having upstaged our radical elements, was invited very cordially by the Western politicians and warmakers to come and beg for us. Those celebrity do-gooders can be relied upon never to put one word out of place; they keep to their own and stick to their scripts so well, you see. All that noisemaking is just a way for the power elite to be born again and live forever; meanwhile our brothers and sisters die at their feet, subjects of their pathos. That is the way of it, Mugu.



Patron of the arts

Every so often our debts are rearranged and we are reorganized and re-enslaved in the latest update of the white man's system. You see, we must not be allowed to fall behind in the race to his global meltdown. Alas, the Irish charity peddlers are part of the dubious politics that is called "development". Do they not recall their own bloody history?

"I will say confidently, that if God bless this kingdom with peace and justice, no usurer is so sure in seventeen years' space to double his principal, and interest upon interest, as that kingdom is within the same time to double the stock both of wealth and people... It is not easy, no, not upon the continent, to find such a confluence of commodities." I could not have made a finer sounding statement, but these promising nuggets come from one eminent Englishman, Francis Bacon, and the scheme for the "civilization" of Ireland in 1617. Old Bacon died in debt and, of course, Ireland was another sad business but, unlike those Irish celebrity beggars and charity peddlers, we must learn from the past, Mugu. The Michael in me is a wiser star who knows what it means to be groomed by people with money to burn and power to keep.



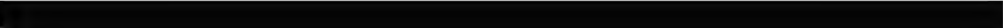
Wildlife lover

In partnership with the UN for the promotion of universal education, Michael will engage in a tax-exempt programme aimed at enriching corporations from the public purse. He will also participate in the raucous launch of a useless book on literacy improvement, courtesy of the same politicians who care so little for education that for many years they would only allot it a mere one per cent of their national budget; but now so-called “universities” are their latest business venture.


You should not expect any rebellions in those hallowed, and now private, grounds. They call what is on offer there “guided freedom” – or training for zombies to you and me, Mugu. But these are just some of the jargons we must adopt and the places at which we must be seen to play the game – the game of speaking of the common good while manufacturing the common bad.



Conversation piece



In our great nation we have the winning government and business team: tax thieves and tax dodgers united! What can I say to you, Mugu? A Messiah has to embrace all this badness and corruption before his own purification. Otherwise, there can be no gleaming path to salvation. This is the old law of the holier-than-thou, and today one must also go by the formalities of truth and reconciliation before getting back to business as usual. But our business will be unusual, I promise.





Listening to the children

Alas, our great weakness as Nigerians is that we like to think that success is all about enterprise, but we don't know the meaning of the white man's greatest industries of usury and speculation. Forget nation building, development and so on. That was all back in the 1970s. Real goods and services are only two per cent of the action in the world now. We're at the end of a war-torn road, Mugu. You wonder what's become of the other ninety-eight per cent, don't you? My friend, it's all in world speculation. Welcome to Casino Capitalism! This is where we must set up shop and you, my old friend sitting there in the Big Apple, are perfectly placed for this venture. Ignore all the wishful chit-chat about fair trade and so on. Two per cent, Mugu, only two per cent!

Come and meet me instead; I am ready to lead you to the source of real riches and to what will be our greatest renaissance!



The twilight zone

All we hear about is democracy and transparency, transparency and democracy... but see how your liberals and pseudo-democrats come to train the African leadership in the real art of 419! The famous Mr Stiglitz, Nobel Prize winner in Economics, was shunned by the World Bank for not agreeing on absolutely all these matters of global 419, but he only tells half the truth. And this will come as no surprise to you if you know who gives that particular Economics prize. Not the Nobel committee; bankers are the ones to make that award, Mugu.

Do not doubt the art in the capitalists' economic outlook. People must suffer, such is life, but in their eyes Africa is a centre of excellence in this respect, a reminder to everyone everywhere of how fortunate they really are as the rug is pulled from under their own feet.

Apparently we in Africa are even “under-polluted”, which means, naturally, that we have golden opportunities for toxic dumping. After all, is it not unthinkable these days that people live from the common lands? People must play the property game. Only then can they come to know what it means to be winners, as we shall be in our own style.



Makeover

So let us go to the Casino, Mugu. I know you are God-fearing man but one can even gamble there on national debts; millions are to be made buying and selling the bonds. The trick is not to be caught holding the dead ducks when the wheel of “speculative attack” turns. Yes, far-away fortunes are made from strife and collapse. You don’t enjoy casinos, Mugu, but really, my dear friend, you are already living in one unless, of course, you have left the planet without telling your friends who still happen to reside here.



Formerly associated with Diana Ross

You must beware of the mind-bending computations in the white man's economics; they don't add up if you're thinking of a future. Their economists are paid to persist with mathematical impossibilities. Their dismal science is getting more so by the day and if truth be told, they've already written off most of this planet as a bad bet. This must be why the ever adventurous Mr. Branson and certain other captains of industry are looking for new business in outer space.

Fear not, Mugu, the members of our celebrity cohort have their feet on the ground and are not looking skywards for new business ventures. Let the others get onwards and upwards, we are planning to get even.



But now seen with Elizabeth Taylor

The African Union will no longer recognize “government by coup.” That would be progress if democracy today was not coup at the polls. Before their rehabilitation as star-struck lovers of democracy our generals arranged things in preparation for their own economic deliverance. As usual they looted and paid out more never-to-be-fulfilled contracts to their fraternities before adopting the master’s two-brands-one-product-no-trouble democracy. But now there are whispers that really our leaders are too corrupt and too greedy, and perhaps the Giant of Africa ought to be brought down a peg or two – and that Nigeria is not as indispensable as was once thought. But believe me, Mugu, we’re not finished yet. It could be our historic destiny to save the world from greed of a much greater degree!



History of the never used Ajaokuta steel plant

Our compatriots are making noises from below, wailing about lies heaped upon lies; like the unemployed urchins who vandalized our billboards. And now the workers boo and jeer in public when they are supposed to sing the national anthem. But don't lose any sleep over the antics of the plebeians. Good business is always done with their "shepherds". During the military dictatorship I remember the labour leader known as Paschal the Rascal. He would always whisper into the ears of the Chief-in-General before every public rally: "I have to say some harsh words against your policies to please the rabble, but I remain your dear comrade after this timeout!"

Sadly with this "anything goes" democracy, labour is like Gulliver, pinned to the ground by a thousand twines made from the laws handed down by the colonial masters and kept up to date by our home-grown oligarchs.



Michael's partners

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The national anthem band

History is a strange business, my friend. Labour here is harnessed by shifty union leaders and repressive laws almost a century old. In this respect we still await 20th century liberties but now that we have already reached the 21st century we find that the 19th century is in vogue everywhere! Nothing could be more appropriate for this young but old fashioned country. I don't mean to sound confusing, my dear Mugu, but we live in confusing times and humanity is ready for a quick march from tragedy to farce, especially in this great land.

For the power of "leadership" here is like ogbanje or abiku, that is, the spirit children who die after every birth only to be reborn endlessly to wreak havoc. Surely, not unlike our emperor of democracy Obasanjo who was accused of stealing his own son's wife and fathering children by her. Even the Chief-in-General Babangida was poised to come back as democratic president supreme. As it was in General Abacha's bedroom, it is business as usual – even in life, death and the afterlife. And then there was President Yar'adua whose greatest gift to his followers was to hover for months between all three.



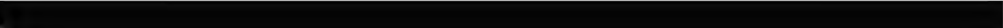
A night of death and rebirth

Our labour leader Adams rode the tiger campaigning for state power in Obasanjo's empire of democracy only to see his electoral victory stolen in broad daylight. As ever, determined not to end up in the belly of the tiger, Adams upped the ante in the struggle of winning back his mandate. But there is no real mandate to hold as long as our people are organised as if Queen Victoria were still on the throne. We're overrun with mission houses offering training for the new 19th century. Instead of Holy Bibles and fine-sounding hymns the new missions, belonging to the ever expanding church of "NGOism", peddle liberal pamphlets and toothless campaigns for the latest hand-me-down causes.


In the official jargon which, of course, we have carefully studied: NGOs = Non Governmental Organisations, GONGOs = Government Organised Non Governmental Organisations, BONGOs = Bank Organised Non-Governmental Organisations, not to mention all the assorted think tanks that also promise to change the world at no political cost to the ruling classes! Take the GONGO devoted to empowering women which sacks the sisters for joining a union. Having briefed ourselves about these dubious operations we have prepared very enlightened pronouncements safe in the knowledge that our elite audience expects every possible deceit in the interest of their own "development".



The Messiah of democracy arises freshly

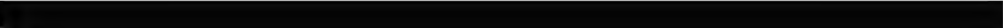


You will never cease to be surprised at the roll call of grasping hands, each more eager than the last to extract our endorsement of their particular noble cause. Nor are they choosy about who else they mingle with, which is so much the better for us. For this is how the most disreputable prophets emerge from exile and near death to mount the saddle of power again, for our leaders are at once victims and perpetrators in power. It is incumbent on them to do and undo one another. Coming out from behind our own rock of exile we shall glide through their troubled ranks.






Emerging from exile

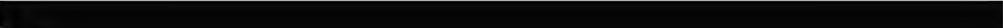


Perhaps you know that historic piece of advice, “The best time to buy stock is when blood is running in the streets”? In polite company today it’s called “buying the dips”. I am sure you think I am trying to disturb you, Mugu, trying to weaken and undermine your faith. Let me utter an old proverb then: “Not to know is bad, not to wish to know is worse”. And so what will the revolution of your forgotten masses, or your African brothers and sisters, or your ethnic bloc, or even your Godly state of the Koran or the Bible have to hold or overthrow after everything has been bought and sold and we are left with nothing?






The paperless office for universal education



It says in the Bible that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter the gates of heaven. So our pastors must dazzle their congregations with their full Gospel business talk and tell us that we misunderstood; that we only need to throw more money at the problem and heaven will surely be ours, Amen. And, after all, did not a company poll carried out on behalf of Nigerians – unasked – call us the happiest people on earth? Say it, brother!






Enlarging the eye of a needle

The Islamic fundamentalists, on their part, have more egalitarian pretensions although they could hardly say a word about the single shoe stolen from one of their sponsors while he was at prayer in his own mosque. Yes, our illustrious former Chief-in-General Babangida and his comrades lurked in the fundamentalist business, just like their American masters once did so freely. Sometimes all the whispering can be heard – sometimes it reaches the ears of the people.


We will never find out who took one of Babangida's luxurious shoes as he was at prayer but the useless shoe left behind at the door of his shining mosque was the illiterates' sign for its useless and power-hungry owner. Michael says we need not be too concerned about an unplanned association with this scurrilous footwear theft. We had just dropped in to Minna for a photo opportunity at Babangida's mosque and, shamelessly, someone swiped just one of our sanctified sandals too. But Michael tells me there is no such thing as bad publicity at this point in our enterprise and of course he speaks from long experience.



After prayers in the mosque



Now is the time to taste the meat in this deal, my dear Mugu. As you can see, we have raised our profile to new heights. And now we are ready for a triangular deal which requires your services in the Big Apple. You are the foreign partner. I am the local middleman. Then there will be our celebrity-loving officials and politicians on call. Just think of Michael Jackson alive again and standing alongside our World Bank-minted ministers. Think of the headlines that are coming, Mugu. Nothing will match the semi-official resurrection of Michael Jackson in Nigeria. The national anthem band will be at the ready and happy to strike up his more popular tunes. You think I am unhinged, but please be patient for a little longer and I will tell you of our delicate speculative scheme.





Launching Michael

Timing is all you need to play your part to perfection, Mugu. We know how you have persevered in the media business and as the saying goes, if you can make it in New York you can make it anywhere. With us, Mugu, you will conquer the Big Apple as the Voice of Nigeria! You laugh at such a preposterous idea, don't you, Mugu? Who would want that label, you think? But with our resurrection now ready to be validated by our elite, to be marketed by our business partners, to be pamphleteered by GONGOs and BONGOs, all that is left to us – we two-in-one – is to prostrate our body before God in church, mosque and shrine. Now, don't you agree that's a story for you, Mugu?

As I say, timing will be everything in this scheme because we shall feed you the choicest bits of news way ahead of the pack. All our high-level encounters will be your property first. You shall be the Voice of Nigeria when all eyes of the world are looking at the phenomenon hitting this land. Yet all this is still only half the proposal I have for you, my old friend.

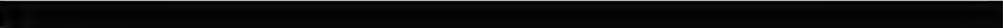


Daddy comes home

Not for nothing have I written at length to tell you the woes of your old country beset by “democracy.” But is our situation so very different from that which pertains in your new country, Mugu? Is it not difficult to distinguish “commander-in-chief” from “celebrity-in-chief” in your vending-machine system? Money goes in and out comes the terminator, minus his hi-tech gizmos. Well now, imagine our “Arnie” cut from our own cloth. Our policies shall be no more noble than Arnie’s since we feel we have done quite enough to help others with our cheap oil! Unlike our past emperors of democracy we shall be speaking of slowing production to raise oil prices – in other words, the popular long-term policy for us that is dreaded in all rapacious consuming nations. And, for good measure, we shall not be promoting payment in dubious currency. Mugu, my friend, you will be at the centre of the storm. You will be amazed at the effect of talking like this at the highest levels! Practically overnight the White House will be solar and wind powered. New York will be in a frenzy of speculation like no other. The U.S. dollar swindle that’s given us socialism for the rich and capitalism for the poor will be left half-naked. It may not survive at all, for which there will be tears of joy!



Walking on the water of the Washington consensus



With our scheme we shall not be taking more ruinous loans, we shall be bargaining on all matters from strength instead. At last we shall have our renaissance in which you can share! Things will be getting worse for you and your new compatriots, so take this opportunity while you can. As long as we have our “black gold” there will be more to our Central Bank than Uncle Sam has to his. Trust me. This is a neat job.

I am, as ever, your comrade in business from the gatekeeper State.

Uzor Maxim Uzoatu





A new hole under the sun

Out-takes from behind the scenes



Port Harcourt



Museum by candlelight



State car



Roadside mechanic



Petrodollar temple



Money that kills



Young and beautiful entrepreneurs



Mud thrown at billboards *



The waterless lake



Capital of the gatekeeper State



The political landscape

Credits and recriminations from behind the scenes

I confess that not everything shown or said in *Masquerade* is quite true. Discerning viewers may suspect that pictures have been doctored. Others may doubt that the real spirit of Michael Jackson lives in this masquerade. Both scientific and spiritual sceptics will be right.

On the first count I must thank Steven McCleery of Capital Scanning in Scotland for his patient work on those few pictures which we digitally reconstructed. I'm sure Steven won't mind if I don't say to which pictures he applied his near surgical skills because it is good at least to exercise the eyes in an epoch of falsehood. When I was working on this project I often spotted carefully constructed digital photographs used in newspapers and magazines with no acknowledgement of their fictional character. This worrying trend is growing all the time. Photographs are not a reliable type of evidence for very much but that's no excuse for abandoning the important distinction between reality and representation.

When it comes to the spiritual resurrection of our star, things are just as complicated. First, I ought to mention all the inspirational work done by unemployed Nigerian graduates who send countless fraudulent missives out into the world. The surprising thing about these incredible scams is how many seemingly upright and educated citizens in countries like Britain are overcome by avarice and put up their money to become accomplices in the theft of public assets from a country like Nigeria. These victims of their own

greed are often shameless in their indignation when they finally admit to having been taken for a ride. Of course there are others who may deserve financial ruin more than the people who answer dishonourable offers of African riches, but let us spare a thought for the rather telling art of the fraudsters.

Masquerade is an allegorical tale about neo-colonialism. It is a far bigger and more profoundly damaging rip-off than all the "419" letters in the world put together. The project was partly inspired by Frantz Fanon's famous book, first published in 1952, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Black Skin, White Masks). Michael Jackson was the perfect star for our spin-off. He was a product of an empire and, as a philanthropist, his support for 'the American way' was never in doubt. More than that, his career seemed to personify the rise to power of the decadent black elites across newly independent African nations who chose to go on serving white masters. The African elites did not become white but in other ways they went even further than the King of Pop in reinventing and aggrandizing themselves.

In countries like Nigeria they created a new kind of feudalism which is a blend of old and new: the old rigid orders upholding inequality mixed with the new opportunistic spirit of capitalism. I have to thank a good friend and co-author in other publications, Femi Folorunso, for many fruitful discussions about the 'feudalism of the soul' which casts a spell over his homeland.

Jackson remains an interesting symbol of this non-denominational orientation of the mind. It is thriving today across all ethnic lines at the expense of the vast majority of Nigerians, not least in the appalling state of their education system. Of course the real stars of *Masquerade* are none other than the Maverick Ejiogbe Twins. They are old fashioned people from the Yoruba heartland. I felt sometimes that I had to point out in public that I am republican while they are royalists at heart. Part of Nigeria's problem is that the old order looks preferable to the new opportunism. Overcoming this stumbling block was what preoccupied Obafemi Awolowo (1909-1987) one of the more far-sighted and honest independence leaders who struggled to create a meaningful social democracy.

So to religiously minded people I must also confess that to the best of my knowledge none of the people who played in this masquerade went through any authentic spiritual transformations. They were simply paid. Years later I have lost track of all their names but I thank them one and all. It is easy to buy a star and there is no shame for any of our performers in saying so. What is shameful is the real political masquerades performed by the celebrities who become the front men for what's been called 'cool capitalism.' Some are targeted and ridiculed by my patient collaborator, the irrepressible satirist Uzor Maxim Uzoatu. Much of what Maxim writes is absolutely true and for those who want to root out the truth many of the sources are provided below.

Maxim wove our own fraudulent story for the publisher *not* to be — Steidl Mack in London. After years of holding on to *Masquerade*, and promising to print a splendid book, Mr Mack stopped communicating and unceremoniously dropped the project. This was after Michael Jackson died so tragically, a victim of his own talents as people thought. Yet despite this double blow I have to thank Mr Mack for paying for a little of our work.

For the production of *Masquerade* as an online and print-on-demand book I must thank the Scottish Arts Council/Creative Scotland, Hamish Barrie of Altered Images Scotland, and Kirsten Lloyd of Stills Gallery in Edinburgh. Among the other people I want to thank wholeheartedly are Jide Adeniyi Jones, Adewale Maja-Pearce and Brigid O'Connor who, at various times, put me up for weeks on end in Lagos and Abuja. Jide, a respected photographer, also kindly donated the pictures on page 97* of the destruction of advertising billboards in Lagos. Adewale, a well-known writer and essayist, helped out as editor and he was also a great sparring partner on the subject of Nigeria. I met Brigid O'Connor in Lagos when she was working for the British Council there. She was the acceptable (Irish) face of that organisation at the time. I also thank Philippa Hall, my wife at the time and mother of my first daughter Olivia. It was Philippa who first took me to Nigeria but then had to put up with my absences.

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During its making between 2001 and 2005 people often told me that *Masquerade* stood out as something new in photography. In fact it is an old brand of cut-and-paste realism that owes a great deal to the experiments of the workers' photography movement in Europe of the 1920s and 1930s. What prompted me to pursue such an approach in Nigeria during the first few years of the 21st century?

I can answer that question best by recounting my first experiences of teaching photography in Nigeria thanks to the British Council who invited me to run a couple of workshops there in the 1990s. Like so many cultural exchanges organised with Europe and North America these workshops were intended to support the development of a democratic civil society. Many of these well-intentioned projects are directed at journalism, the arts and letters, film and photography. Most of them are deeply flawed in my opinion. In essence, the effect, if not the governing idea, is to replicate the appearance of Western liberalism in Africa.

Few of the international sponsors seem to care that liberal values were forged from illiberal struggles and class conflict in their own countries. What most foreign initiatives seek is a false consensus on foreign soil which lends support to a false politics at home. In saying this I have to thank a most unlikely teacher, my Italian mother who has never been left-wing or interested in politics. She came to Scotland from Italy in 1946 at the age of 17. Life in Britain taught her a lesson which she passed on: British imperialism began at home. All its damaging effects were to be seen in the policies and

meritocratic attitudes which still reproduce inequality in Britain. There are plenty of books which can tell us this. But having a feeling for them is something I owe to my mother's shock at the sight of her adopted country, not only when she first arrived after the war but as she saw Britain developing over the subsequent decades too.

For some the solution to Britain's imperial ethos is Celtic nationalism. However, too many nationalist political leaders particularly in Scotland, obviously want to hang on to Uncle Sam's coat-tails no matter how much they would deny it. What should be discussed much more is this; by comparison with US 'super-imperialism' the glory days of the British Empire may even seem like a relatively responsible form of political domination and economic exploitation. Thankfully going backwards is not an option. The difficulty in Nigeria is to break the feudalism of the soul and turn towards the future without fear and without the sort of subservience which is instituted by charities and NGOs. *Masquerade* remains a gesture in that direction. Appropriately enough I must also thank the many people in the Nigerian trade union movement and pro-labour civil society organisations, who helped me in my work as a social researcher and, more importantly, who show that same confidence in egalitarianism.

Owen Logan, Edinburgh, February 2014.

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Masquerade — Michael Jackson Alive in Nigeria

By Owen Logan & Uzor Maxim Uzoatu

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